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ABSTRACT

A three-year national study of adult museum programs used a qualitative research approach and naturalistic inquiry and interviewed 508 museum program participants, 75 instructors, and 143 museum program planners in all types and sizes of museums, including art institutes, natural and cultural historical museums, science centers, historic houses, and botanical gardens. These were among the findings and conclusions: (1) 94% of museums offer some type of adult learning; (2) adult learners desire to learn regardless of their age, have individual preferred learning styles, and prefer to actively participate in the learning process; (3)among programs offered adult learners are basic programs such as volunteer training, lectures, and workshops, as well as less traditional programs such as community service, theater, and field schools; (4) program planners have multiple roles and tend to be experienced professional women with high levels of education; (5) experience, teaching ability, and communication skills are among the traits that should be examined when choosing an instructor; (6) instructors describe their key roles as facilitating learning, making classes fun, being attentive, and encouraging participation; (7) program participants rate challenging content and dynamic, organized instructors as most important to them; (8) four steps to designing excellent learning experiences are to create the vision and create excellence, identify audiences, generate and investigate program ideas, and sort and prioritize program ideas. (Contains six appendixes, an extensive bibliography, and an index.)(SLR)

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